

The Australian Atheist



ISSN 1035-1477

Issue Number 16
July - August 2009

ATHEISM:

is the acceptance that there is no credible scientific or factually reliable evidence for the existence of god, gods or the supernatural.

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We welcome original articles, book reviews, letters to the editor, quotes and snippets for possible inclusion in THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST. All contributions are subject to Editorial approval.

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ATHEIST FOUNDATION
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ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

EST. 1970

PHILOSOPHY

The Atheist Foundation of Australia recognises scientific method as the only rational means toward understanding reality. To question and critically examine all ideas, testing them in the light of experiment, leads to the discovery of facts.

As there is no scientific evidence for supernatural phenomena, atheists reject belief in 'God', gods and other supernatural beings. The universe, the world in which we live, and the evolution of life, are entirely natural occurrences.

No personality or mind can exist without the process of living matter to sustain it. We have only one life - here and now. All that remains after a person dies is the memory of their life and deeds in the minds of those who live.

Atheists reject superstition and prejudice along with the irrational fears they cause. We recognise the complexity and interdependence of life on this planet. As rational and ethical beings we accept the challenge of making a creative and responsible contribution to life.

AIMS

To encourage and to provide a means of expression for informed free-thought on philosophical and social issues.

To safeguard the rights of all non-religious people.

To serve as a focal point for the fellowship of non-religious people.

To offer reliable information in place of superstition and to offer the methodology of reason in place of faith so as to enable people to take responsibility for the fullest development of their potential as human beings.

To promote atheism.

AndrewsJakeman

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OPINION

On 2 June this year Dr. George Tiller, a prominent late-term abortion doctor, was shot and killed by the pro-life Christian group Operation Rescue. Of course no member of Operation Rescue held the gun or pulled the trigger, and as far as I am aware they had no actual involvement whatsoever, but they must bear some degree of moral responsibility for this man's death.

Dr. Tiller was shot dead as he walked into his Reformation Lutheran Church in Wichita, Kansas. The suspected killer, Scott Roeder, had apparently become "very religious in an Old Testament, eye-for-an-eye way", his former wife, Lindsey Roeder, told the Associated Press, and had suffered from mental illness at various times in his life.

So why put blame at the feet of Operation Rescue, who, along with other anti-abortion groups, moved quickly to distance themselves and condemned the killing? Operation Rescue is an organisation that intimidates abortion doctors. Here are a couple of statements by Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue: "When I, or people like me, are running the country, you'd better flee, because we will find you, we will try you, and we will execute you..." and "I want you to just let a wave of intolerance wash over you. I want you to let a wave of hatred wash over you, Yes, hate is good...Our goal is a Christian nation. We have a Biblical duty, we are called by God, to conquer this country. We don't want pluralism. Our goal must be simple. We must have a Christian nation built on God's law, on the Ten Commandments. No apologies." What hope then for a mentally ill, Old Testament style religious anti-abortionist like Scott Roeder? There is no way to know if he was even aware of Operation Rescue or Randall Terry, but their words and actions, and those of other like-minded organisations, must surely have had an influence. After all, it was reported that "Scott Roeder harboured a burning, 'eye-for-an-eye' anger toward abortion doctors. He once subscribed to a magazine suggesting 'justifiable homicide' against them, and apparently likened US doctor Dr. George Tiller to the Nazi death-camp doctor Josef Mengele." It was also reported that "Some anti-abortion activists said they were familiar with Roeder. Regina Dinwiddie, a protester in the Kansas City area, said she had picketed a Planned Parenthood clinic with Roeder. She said she was 'glad' about Tiller's death."

Now supposing that one day an Atheist kills a bishop or some other religious figure, purely because of atheism. It is surely not implausible that such a thing could happen. A mentally deranged Atheist with a real or perceived grievance against the church could just as easily carry out the same sort of crime. What then would be the difference between such a deed and that of Scott Roeder? Well, the murder of Dr. Tiller was by no means an isolated incident. From the Left Coaster website of 2 June 2009 we have the following: "All told, according to statistics provided by the National Abortion Federation and not including this morning's murder, since 1977, there have been seven murders, 17 attempted murders, 41 bombings, 175 arsons, 96 attempted bombings or arsons, 390 invasions, 1400 cases of vandalism, 1993 cases of trespassing, 100 butyric acid attacks, 659 anthrax threats, 179 cases of assault and battery, 406 death threats, four kidnappings, 151 burglaries, and 525 cases of stalking specifically directed at clinics, their workers, or their volunteers in the US and Canada. That's over 6,100 cases of terrorist activity by the 'pro-life' movement. And that's just what was reported — the actual numbers are probably much higher."

On the Christian side there has been ample incitement to harm those involved with abortion, as evidenced by the above figures. When was the last time you heard or read about an Atheist organisation inciting harm against the religious? If an Atheist ever carries out a similar crime, it is going to be a one off. And therein lies the difference.

Dennis



THE AMERICAN WAY ?

HERETICAL HAPPENINGS

KEEPING YOU IN THE KNOW

Greetings

Preparations for the Atheist Convention next March are well under way. Speakers confirmed for the event so far are Richard Dawkins, Phillip Adams, Taslima Nasrin and Peter Singer. This is indeed a wondrous line up with more such personalities in the pipeline.

I would like to thank everyone who responded to the request of contacting head office with expressions of interest in attending. This has provided a basis for initiating investigation of venues etc. A big thankyou to all you good people and sorry but the numbers showing interest disallowed personal replies. I must say there was considerable enthusiasm expressed in many of the emails received. Let me assure you that there is no need to panic. No one will miss out.

The tentative budget for the Convention is very tight and we have approached the Victorian government for financial assistance such as afforded the Parliament of World's Religions in Victoria to be held later this year or as NSW similarly contributed to the visit from the Pontiff. Mr Rudd has also received a request for a grant. If either or both are accepted, we will be able to advertise more widely and possibly bring down the ticket cost per person. Speaking of which, there will be early bird, pension and student concessions. These and the full registration fees have not been finalised as of yet as they are partly dependant on the Victorian and Federal governments responses.

Many people have volunteered their time and expertise, helping with the nuts and bolts to do with the Convention all under the guiding hand of AFA member, John Perkins, who is doing an admirable job. The complexities in pulling off a successful event are truly mind boggling. The talented persons involved have the appreciation and gratitude of the AFA Committee and I am sure also that of our membership.

The Atheist Convention is going to be a one-off memorable occasion and I would advise those still humming and ha-ing to come down on the side of attending. As it is a first for Australia, it is unlikely to happen ever again in such a form especially with the magnificent line-up of Atheist speakers and intellectual minds planned. It would be a real shame to miss this history-making moment because of prevarication caused by not recognising the importance this event means to Atheism in Australia and indeed, possibly to the wider world, which will be watching. Think about it!

A small comment is necessary about the Opinion piece by Dennis. Atheists wear with some understandable annoyance the linking of us with Stalinist and fascist regimes as a constant theme, even by mainstream members of the clergy who should know better. I personally think they do know better but use such nefarious connections because all else has failed. These are words out of desperation in fact. Grave mistakes and intentional mayhem made by various ideologically driven and sometimes deranged personalities in the twentieth century had many reasons as to why they occurred. The Atheism freely chosen by individuals in response to religious absurdity in the present has nothing in common with them.

The accusations of "militant" and "fundamentalist" Atheism are attempts at aligning tyrannical regimes with those who are only concluding in ever-growing numbers that there is no god. The threat we pose to the mental integrity of religious folk is real and we should all be mindful of it. But this does not mean we have to abide quietly the extremist propaganda, the purposefully provocative and erroneous outpourings by the thoughtless and sometimes by the devious, meant to denigrate falsely.

Atheists with a penchant for letter writing could do no better than using some of the statistics compiled by Dennis on the true nature of militancy and fundamentalism as expressed in his piece. It would also do more good than harm in reminding the public at large that the huge content of religious mayhem on television news is not make believe but is the consequence of the faith imperative and not the Atheist one. Interestingly enough, we never ever

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get a negative mention. But even if or when, that happens, let's keep it in proper perspective.

At last, the time has arrived for the AFA's complaint about discrimination with our bus signs to have an official airing in Tasmania. A conciliation meeting between the Metro bus Company and the AFA will take place on 4 August. This may be only a first step but it is an important one. A Media Release concerning this matter is on Page 26 of this issue. The next magazine will have details of the outcome of that consultation.

We now have a dedicated web site for the Atheist Convention to be held in March next year, though the site is still under construction. The AFA's Chief Technical Supervisor and Committee member, Grant Ettrick will add new information when it becomes available. Visiting the site and adding your expression of interest about the Atheist Convention would be a big help in preparations for this most marvellous event.

<http://www.atheistconvention.org.au>

Until we meet again,



Australian National University Atheists

The ANU League of Extraordinary Atheists was founded by a group of students who wanted Australia's highest ranking university to have a bona-fide club or organization that embraced atheism. There were roughly seven religious clubs and societies at the ANU before the founding of the League. Now there is a voice in the student body that explicitly represents reason, rationality, logic, science, and rejects the notion of God.

The League aims to promote atheism within the campus life and outside, and aims to have atheists seen as a body of people deserving of respect within the community. We shall be a constant alternative to the many religious organizations on campus, offering a rational, viable, fun alternative.

We enable like minded people to gather and be part of a community, where those seeking to know about atheism, or to learn the truth about religion can come without being demonised, insulted, or made to feel inferior. With our library soon to be in action, we will also be a place of learning and of knowledge — the key weapons to combat ignorance.

We hold weekly meetings in the ANU Chaplaincy on Wednesdays, during which we have discussions, debates, watch documentaries, and allow lectures to be presented from religious groups (with a question and answer session afterwards) and from academics.

We also do our best to support groups that we overlap with in terms of interest, such as the ANU Queer Society (we would fight against homophobia, religious or otherwise), and the climate change groups as well.

Anyone is welcome to come along and find out what Atheism is all about — religious and non-religious alike. We do not tolerate any kind blatant insulting in our group — we are of the philosophy that to change the mind of a person you must present them with evidence and a good argument, not a poor insult and a bad attitude.

We had over 185 members sign up on market day, with meetings already under way with a good number of students consistently attending. Things are looking good for the ANU League of Extraordinary Atheists. We hope that Australia's top university will from now on always have a group that will represent secular and atheistic interests in our university and provide support and community to those who need it.

The League would also like to express their deepest thanks to the Atheist Foundation of Australia for the friendly, personable, extremely generous support and aid. Thanks to them we can now start our library and continue to fight the good fight! We look forward to working together with them frequently in the future.

Alex Holmes, President

“Healing the Earth with Care and Concern”

By Barry Brannan

“Healing the Earth with Care and Concern” was the title of a multi-faith forum at the University of Tasmania in Hobart on Monday 8 June 2009. After seeing a small article about it in the *Mercury*, I thought I would go along to learn about how many different faiths might help “heal the earth”.

Unfortunately, what I got seemed little more than another attempt to maintain the relevance of religion in the modern world and to reinforce existing beliefs.

As I walked into the lecture theatre, I saw a group of Buddhists dressed in robes with hands clasped. I overheard a lady behind me saying she wondered if there were any atheists present so she could hear their perspective.

The first major speaker was Professor Desmond Cahill who is the Program Director of the 2009 Parliament of World Religions to be held in Melbourne in December. He is also one of three researchers for the Freedom of Religion and Belief project (http://www.hreoc.gov.au/frb/frb_2008.html#researchers).

The Professor outlined some of the events planned for December, as well as other concerns that he had. He said that the Parliament was not about conversion but the typical outcome would be a strengthening of one’s own faith. He said it was important to counter extremism in religion.

He was concerned about a negative attitude towards religion in the media, universities and some sections of the arts. He said that irrationality and superstition were amongst the criticisms of religion but that social researchers were “coming to realise” that religion is a positive force overall, citing evidence that religious people were more likely to volunteer and religion gave people a sense of belonging that we all need. He warned of the power of secularism in Australia.

Presenting a slide entitled “The Religious Crisis in Tasmania”, he expressed disappointment about the trend of declining Christian religiosity in Australia and particularly Tasmania. He cited census figures showing a 32.15 per cent jump in the “No religion” category from 76,000 in 1996 to 101,569 in 2006.

The second major speaker was Trevor Parton from the

Centre for Ecology and Spirituality in Glenburn, Victoria. After asking the audience to sing three times “Fire I am. Air I am. Water, Earth and spirit I am”, he said that there had been significant shifts in religious thinking over the last 50 years. He said scientific discoveries indicate we live in an expanding, evolving universe and that humans are integral to the process by means of a “likely evolution of our species from earlier ones”. We must now accept that humans are part of nature and not separate from it. He talked about a “Deep Ecology” movement that has swept the world over the last twenty years and that it could be an ethic that all religions can embrace.

We then heard more briefly from a number of faiths. Speakers said they were asked to speak about how their faith motivated their interest in “healing the earth with care and concern”.

The speakers were:

- Aunty Eva Richardson — Aboriginal Elder
- Dr Lucy Tatman — Quaker — School of Philosophy, University of Tasmania.
- The Venerable Choje Lama Shedrup — Buddhist
- Michal Golebowicz — Jewish
- Associate Professor Udayan Ray — Hindu
- The Rev. John Middleton — Anglican
- Imam Sabri Samson — Muslim
- Stuart McKenzie Hall — Baha’i

This part was called a “panel discussion” but there was no time left for discussion or questions. Instead, each speaker in turn spoke from the lectern about some of their beliefs and background. More than one speaker showed a glint of enthusiasm about telling their story to a new audience.

There were scattered mentions of caring for God’s creation. The Buddhist mentioned living a simple life. The Jew said we could repair the world through prayer. The Anglican said his love of God or his understanding of God’s creations were sufficient to motivate his care for the earth.

The Muslim had a slide saying “Be merciful to Allah’s creation and he will be merciful to you”. The Baha’i gave a quote “Contemplation of nature creates an awareness of the ‘signs’ and ‘tokens’ of God and

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constitutes proof of His existence".

What was missing here was any real focus on "healing the earth". What problems needed healing and what were the solutions? Nothing specific was mentioned. What would religious organisations do about global warming? How would they help the starving? How would they fix water shortages? Where were the data and analysis about religious attitudes towards ecological issues? Nothing was mentioned.

Instead of setting a basis for changing priorities and

attitudes, the forum was focussed on how religion was relevant by getting various religions together to all agree that they had some reason to be involved.

Of course, religions have no role to play, and no interest. Religious texts have little relevance to modern ecological issues. Religious believers are too busy praying to be extracting ice core samples in Antarctica. Obsessed with fighting abortion and euthanasia laws, they have little time for science.

Religions are only interested in themselves, and any professed interest in healing the earth is either a ruse or delusion. It's an indictment of religion itself.

The Foxhole Atheist

By David Milan

Most of us have come across that tired old canard; *There are no atheists in foxholes*. Cute, perhaps, trite, certainly, and remarkable for its being uncontaminated by one shred of evidence. The last time I was blessed with this well-intentioned profundity, it was delivered with gravitas and an ominous air, accompanied by the lugubrious wagging of the head. My friend clearly had the perilous state of my immortal soul in his sights, his remedy for my parlous condition was readily available, were I but to submit myself to his evangelistic fervour.

You get the message, of course. This one aphorism neatly sums up the jaded atheist's delusion that we can go on through life without a god. Our conceit, our flimsy self-assurance and unseemly bravado will surely desert us when, *in extremis*, the tall, emaciated, hooded gent arrives with a rusty scythe slung over his shoulder, to beckon us with his bony finger pointed squarely at our chests.

The dreary argument continues that, faced with the prospect of a mightily unpleasant eternity minus god, we all instinctively turn to the supernatural, to any deity on call, willing and able to rescue us from our looming demise, on this occasion, *via* our aphorism, a wartime setting. It is also the discredited Pascal's Wager all over again, and just as absurd now as it was in the seventeenth century.

Who knows whether an atheist in a foxhole swiftly hedges his or her bets and seizes God's hand at the sight of the enemy's bloody bayonet? Who says that an atheist discards long-held convictions to urgently reinstate repudiated, irrational beliefs from Sunday school days? I say again, who says?

Harlan Coben is a world best-selling novelist, a former soldier and a thoughtful observer of the human condition.

He writes:

...have you heard the expression that there are no atheists in foxholes? It's a lie, you know. In fact, just the opposite is true. When you are in a foxhole, when you are face to face with death, that is when you know for sure there is no god. It's why you fight to survive, to draw one more breath. It's why you call out to any and every entity, because you don't want to die. Because in your heart of hearts, you know that death is the end-game. No hereafter, no paradise, no gods, just nothingness.



FROM THE INBOX

ATHEISM is the acceptance that there is no credible scientific or factually reliable evidence for the existence of a god, gods or the supernatural.

What really angered me about your website is that you quoted two great minds that totally contradict your worldview. You quoted Einstein and Galileo, both men accepted credible scientific and factual reliable evidence for the existence of God. Einstein was a Deist, and Galileo a Christian. How dare you quote such great minds, and this is the same reason why I am antagonistic towards Atheists.

In view of such harmony in the Universe there are those who say there is no God, but what angers me the most is that they quote me in support of such views. Albert Einstein

Your website's deprived morality stultifies your integrity and credibility, you have so many antagonistic quotes on religion that you made Atheism almost the same as anti-theism. You people are fools, you make religious people antagonistic towards Atheists, and you ruin the reputation of Atheists. Great job being complete morons, have a good night and I really do hope you people grow functional brains.

P.S. The greatest and most influential scientists of all time believed in God: The list by rank is:

1. Isaac Newton (Christian)
2. Albert Einstein (Deist)
3. Neils Bohr (Lutheran)
4. Charles R. Darwin (Unitarian/Deist/Agnostic)
5. Louis Pasteur (Christian)
6. Sigmund Freud (Atheist) your first person
7. Galileo Galilei (Catholic)
8. Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (Catholic)
9. Johannes Kepler (Christian)
10. Nicolaus Copernicus (Christian)
11. Michael Faraday (Christian)
12. James Clerk Maxwell (Anglican)

11/12 most influential scientists of all time believed in God, 9/12 were fervent Christian believers. I don't know how it feels to look stupid in the face of history, but I know you morons always feel stupid and ignore it. I as a Deist support religion, and am glad that the most influential Scientists believed in God (though not my concept of God). Like Einstein said:

I'm not an atheist, and I don't think I can call myself a pantheist. We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God. We see the universe marvellously arranged and obeying certain laws but only dimly understand these laws. Albert Einstein

You people as Atheists have no philosophy, you're a joke, you're ignorant, and you're straight out hated for your stupidity and brash comments. Then people argue why Atheists are the most discriminated minority in the United States.

Irving

Hello Irving,

Thanks for your communication regarding the religious status of scientists. Doesn't it make you wonder that, if they were devout Christians, they should have spent their lives disproving so much of Christianity's holy book? They proved the earth is neither flat, nor the centre of the universe, and is billions, not thousands of years old; and humans evolved over an enormous length of time from less complex living structures – not constructed overnight in the image of anyone. Surely a devout Christian would spend his or her life attempting to prove the truth of the bible?

Religionists desirous of basking in Einstein's reflected glory often proclaim him to have been a believer, however, the following quotes should disabuse you of this fantasy:

It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal god and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly. If something is in me which can be called religious, then it is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world so far as our science can reveal it.

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Albert Einstein

I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own; a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. Neither can I believe that the individual survives the death of his body, although feeble souls harbor such thoughts through fear or ridiculous egotisms... Albert Einstein

A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death. Albert Einstein

He once referred to himself as a deist. However, that's merely a polite way of saying I don't believe in your god or your religion, without incurring the wrath and recriminations of religious zealots. When someone doesn't know something it is common for them to say, "God knows where it is..." this is not a confession of religious belief, merely an exasperated response to ignorance. When seekers after the origins of the universe, life and everything else came to a dead end, they would say "God must have made it." In other words, we've no idea. However they were quick to qualify this statement, as Einstein did, by saying this 'god', after making everything, took off never to be seen again, having no interest in his/her creation. That is the meaning of deist, and that's why, in my opinion a deist is an Atheist by another name.

You say you are a deist. If so, it beats me why you are so upset when someone disagrees with you about the religiosity or otherwise of people. That's usually the response of theists who believe in the one true religion etc. I think you are taking this religious stuff too seriously. It is bad for your health to become angry over trivia. There are so many really important things to get upset over such as overpopulation, refugees, wars, famines, rising seas, droughts, human rights... furthermore, you say that as a deist you support religion. Which religion? Is there a deist religion?

Your conclusions regarding the religious feelings of the scientists mentioned suggest you are ignorant of the reality of life in most countries in most eras. The current societal and legal acceptance of Atheism in Australia, New Zealand, and Western Europe, is very recent and not representative of the rest of the world. In the U.S.A., as you suggest, a reputable survey indicated that it would be easier for a gay, black, unemployed

person to be elected president than an Atheist – no matter how perfect his or her credentials might be. The reason for this is that the general standard of education in the U.S.A. is very low – especially in the social, political and general sciences.

When the scientists from your list were living and working, it was positively dangerous to declare oneself to be an Atheist. No institute would hire you, no journal would publish your work; you would be pilloried and, in the Middle Ages, tortured and probably murdered in the most painful manner by the church, for the crime of heresy and apostasy. Fear of death and torture at the hands of the church, kept most people from publicly stating their disbelief, although a few extraordinarily brave people preferred to die rather than accept the idiocies of the church. Martyrs to reason – for which I have the utmost admiration.

Galileo and the other scientists on your list wanted to live, work, learn, research and discover the physical principles that governed the universe... and if that meant they had to pretend to be Christians, then so be it; they followed the example of Henri IV of France, who is famously quoted as saying; "Paris is worth a mass," when offered the city if he would become a catholic.

This quote from Galileo indicates a somewhat less than enthusiastic [and potentially dangerous] attitude towards religion's anti scientific stance:

*I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.
Galileo Galilei*

I suggest you are antagonistic towards atheists because they don't support your view of the world, and that makes you nervous. There's no need to be nervous – no one cares what you believe – as long as you allow others to believe or disbelieve what they will.

I don't understand why you consider it immoral for the Atheist Foundation of Australia to suggest these people were atheists. You reckon we're wrong – and that's your right – but it doesn't make us immoral. Morality is about human behaviour towards life, not belief.

You also dislike what you call our "Antagonistic quotes on religion". It would be helpful if you offered a few examples. I assure you the Atheist Foundation of Australia is not anti theism, it is pro choice in all things, therefore it is opposed to the indoctrination and brainwashing of children with a particular religion before they have the experience to make up their own

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minds. We also object to religions influencing laws that would advantage members of a particular religion, while disadvantaging others. As well, it seems obvious to us that the commercial activities of religions that have nothing to do with charity, should pay the billions of dollars in tax they are now avoiding – placing an unfair burden on the rest of us. We also reckon that religious schools are socially divisive and if people want to send their children to a religious school they should pay for it themselves. Furthermore, if a school accepts state money for running expenses, they should abide by the same rules as state schools. It is also particularly galling to hear religionists claiming to be the foundation and arbiter of morality, when nothing could be further from the truth. There are so many ways religions are ripping off the country and interfering in the lives of citizens that it is impossible to mention them all.

If religions and the religious would keep their activities private among consenting adults then there'd be no need for the Atheist Foundation of Australia. But as they won't leave the rest of us alone, we have to do our best to remind politicians they have a duty to all Australians, not only religious adherents.

You enjoy the relatively egalitarian, just and humane society in which you live; are you aware that it was made possible mainly through the philosophies of atheists of the 17th century in the period we call 'The Enlightenment'? If government had been left to religion, we would still be in the intellectual and spiritual darkness of the Middle Ages. As Bertrand Russell wrote:

You find as you look around the world that every single bit of progress in humane feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every step toward the diminution of war, every step toward better treatment of the colored races, or every mitigation of slavery, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized churches of the world. I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world. Bertrand Russell

You are correct in stating that atheism isn't a philosophy. It is merely an intellectual position that accepts we don't know everything. Philosophy is something else again, and it would be wonderful if, instead of religious instruction, children in schools were taught the major streams of human philosophical thought... we might then have a chance of lifting

ourselves out of the mindless, materialistic morass in which we are wallowing.

Best wishes,

Peter
Public Relations Team
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

H_i

I have heard of the following argument explaining why no reasonably intelligent person could ever be an absolute atheist but rather an agnostic at best and wish to find out if there is a rebuttal for it.

If one would ask an atheist whether he or she knows absolutely everything, the answer would always be no for no one can ever make such a claim. Then the response to that would be that if the atheist does not know everything, does this not imply that in the realm of knowledge that the atheist does not have, there may lie the possibility of a God existing?

How would respond to such logic?

Chris — A believer in the only one true and living eternal creator God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ (God Himself) and being made known by the Holy Spirit (God Himself)

H_ello Chris,

No, there's no rebuttal for the argument that no reasonably intelligent person could ever claim absolute certainty for anything asserted as knowledge. I would say, rather, that if there is one 'Golden Rule,' that is it. It is certainly the cardinal guideline of science, and to my mind is the basis of all humility and perhaps sanity. I often recall the heartfelt plea of Jacob Bronowski, lamenting at the ruins of Auschwitz and quoting Oliver Cromwell: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken." (Pity that Oliver didn't heed his own advice). In other words, any reasonably intelligent (and humane) person cannot be an absolute atheist, or an absolute Nazi, or an absolute Muslim, or an absolute Darwinist, or an absolute Hindu.

So, the atheist certainly does not know everything; in fact, like the rest of us, she knows hardly anything at all. And yes, this most certainly does imply that there

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(Continued from page 11)

may indeed lie the possibility of a God existing. That is the way I would respond to 'such logic.' It will not escape your notice that there is a glaring (and deliberate) omission in this answer to your enquiry. It isn't avoidance - it's just postponement.

Now, it would greatly please me if you would answer a question of mine: I have heard, you see, of an argument

explaining why no reasonably intelligent person could ever be an absolute Christian but rather an agnostic at best and wish to find out if there is a rebuttal for it. Can you help me?

Wishing you well,

Mike
Public Relations Team
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Atheist Foundation launches anti-boredom pack for young students

Due to a growing number of scripture class complaints from parents with children in state schools, the AFA is offering a free project kit for those who opt out. It is a well presented colour-in book with templates of various scenes and animals with a personal message for students.

Children who opt out of scripture class often have nothing to do but twiddle their thumbs because of narrowly thought out legislative requirements prohibiting any kind of meaningful alternative. This kit provides mental stimulation about the natural world for children without conflicting with the ill-conceived regulations.

The AFA project kit is a great alternative for parents who value their children's independent thinking abilities and wish to nurture them. We hope that many parents will recognise they don't need the government indoctrinating their children with divisive religious myths that haven't a skerrick of evidence in support.



The AFA project kit will highlight the ridiculousness of wasting valuable student learning time in state schools with mumbo jumbo representing one of the many thousands of faiths.

Parents looking for an alternative to state-supported religious indoctrination can contact head office for more information.

Do not train children to learning by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.

Plato

It must be remembered that the purpose of education is not to fill the minds of students with facts... it is to teach them to think, if that is possible, and always to think for themselves.

Robert Hutchins

Prayer and the Big Picture

By Charles Cornwall

In a previous incarnation, about forty years ago, I was a Baptist minister. Like all of my clerical brethren, I uttered many pious platitudes from the pulpit. Now, as an atheist, the thought of once having uttered these platitudes makes me inwardly cringe. One of them, attributed to Augustine (probably erroneously), went like this: *God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love.*

Well may I now cringe, but this is precisely what all Christians believe. Every Christian believes that God loves him or her as an individual. Because God is both omnipotent and loves us individually, he listens to and answers the prayers of the faithful. So great is this loving god that he is able to do this while, simultaneously, listening to and responding to the prayers of millions of other devotees. Hence, in the words of Tennyson (this time correctly attributed), another of those pulpit platitudes: *More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.* So say the faithful.

Now, if I were to challenge one of these Christians about his/her [this?] belief in prayer the answer would probably go something like this, “I know prayer works because I have proved it in my own life.” As a sceptic, my response to that would be similar to that of American author Guy P. Harrison: “claims of answered prayers usually can be explained as nothing more than misrepresentations, coincidences, or statistically expected results that don’t necessarily have anything to do with a supernatural cause.”

The unfortunate fact is that Christians tend to view prayer from the perspective of their own small world. This allows them to rationalise when their prayers don’t produce the hoped for result (“God moves in a mysterious way”, “God’s answer was no”) or to simply overlook the instances of no reply while exaggerating an “answer” that accords with their expectations. What Christians need to do is consider their belief in prayer *in the light of the big picture.*

Christians would say that they do consider the big picture. Did they not pray for the victims of the Victorian bushfires and the Chinese earthquake, etc? But to what effect? Did their prayers bring back to life any of the dead victims? Did their prayers result in the injured being miraculously healed? Did the destroyed houses rebuild themselves? Did their prayers diminish

the anguish and despair of the surviving victims? The clear answer is no. So what did these prayers achieve? Clearly, nothing at all (apart, perhaps, from making the believers feel better for having done their Christian duty).

As a bit of an aside, I have noticed that even our present and former Prime Ministers have indulged in this same pious nonsense. The most recent example being Kevin Rudd’s comment, when interviewed at the site of the disastrous Victorian bushfires, that the “nation’s thoughts and prayers” were with the victims. Why the “and prayers”? Are prayers different from thoughts? More effective perhaps? This is the implication. So what did these “and prayers” achieve? Nothing. And lest I be accused of showing a political bias, let me say that I clearly remember John Howard promising his prayers on several occasions. Am I being cynical when the thought occurs to me that our Prime Ministers have dropped this line into their remarks in order to curry favour with church-going voters? Or were they just following the lead of that great believer in prayer, George W. Bush (he of Iraq and WMD and “God told me to.”)?

Recently I read a powerful article, *Prayer & Babies*, by Guy P. Harrison in the February 2009 issue of *American Atheist*. In the article he demonstrated the total irrationality of the notion of effective prayer when considered in the light of the big picture. With his permission I quote a number of extracts from his article:

More than 26,000 children under the age of five die every 24 hours in developing nations, according to UNICEF. Most of them are killed by malnutrition and diseases that are easily prevented or treated in wealthier societies. This carnage totals more than 9 million children per year.

...[These children] suffer terribly in their final days and hours, enduring high fevers, severe headaches, cramps and nausea. Is anything in the world more unjust than their fate?

Are there any other victims who make more appropriate candidates for a god to rescue than these babies? One would think prayers for them would be a high priority for a god to respond to rapidly and favorably.

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Certainly these prayers, above all others, should get god's attention and inspire action. But the children keep dying.

Those who claim that praying causes positive results are in a tough spot given the long dark shadow of 9 million more dead babies each year.

Keep in mind, these dead babies had not been blasphemous, or sacrilegious. Most of them barely lived long enough to learn to speak. These babies were not gay. They didn't belong to atheist clubs, watch pornography, or listen to immoral music. They were babies.

Praying mothers and their dying babies – approximately 100 million per decade – provide a devastating blow against belief in prayer. Atheists should cite this tragedy forcefully and frequently because the agony and death of young innocents on a massive scale makes a compelling case against the power of prayer.

The millions of children who died last year, and the mothers who prayed for them, deserve a mention every time someone claims that prayer brought on a miraculous healing of some disease. When believers say that praying brought them more money, a better job or success in love, atheists need only bring up the 26,000 babies who were not saved by prayer yesterday and the 26,000 who won't be saved today.

It is not rude or unfair to ask believers why their gods do not respond to the most urgent and

important prayers of all. Given the prominence of prayer in so many religions, this is a meaningful challenge. It may promote rational thinking by spurring believers to question even more than prayer. For undoubtedly some of them will have the honesty and courage to consider the possibility that the prayers of so many broken-hearted mothers go unanswered every day because no gods are there to hear them [emphasis mine].

Finally, I would like to make a couple more observations in addition to those so eloquently and powerfully made by Guy Harrison.

First: if for the sake of argument we were to accept the Christian view that god hears and responds to the prayers of believers, what does this say about the character of god? Let us remember that, according to Jesus, god does not play favourites ("[he] sends his rain on the just and on the unjust" Matthew 5:45). But if, in fact, he does respond to the comparatively piddling requests of the faithful while ignoring the anguished pleadings of the mothers of dying children then it clearly demonstrates that he *does* play favourites. This is hardly the sort of god who deserves the lavish adoration bestowed on him by all those happy-clappy, heavenward-gazing, swaying, swooning charismatics or the kneeling, crossing-themselves, rosary-fingering, mass-attending Catholics each Sunday.

Second: what does the concept of this prayer-answering god say about those queue-jumping Christians who make their piddling requests while knowing that their god hasn't yet got around to answering the anguished prayers of all those broken-hearted mothers? Nothing very flattering in my opinion.



Canberra Reptile Sanctuary

As a lover of all science, and with a pretty strict dedication to supporting research, conservation, and scientific education, we would also be interested in offering Atheist Foundation members 10% off admission to the Sanctuary.

The Canberra Reptile Sanctuary Incorporated (CRSI) is a not-for-profit association dedicated to the promotion of reptile research, conservation, and education. Through the promotion of scientific truth it is the sanctuaries long term goal to elevate societal understanding of all reptiles and wildlife in general to a level where appreciation of these animals is reached - after all extinct means GONE.

Dustin Welbourne
Chief Scientist
Canberra Reptile Sanctuary
www.canberrareptilesanctuary.org.au

Logo Competition and New Website

We had a wonderful response to our request for a logo. Thank you all so much for sending in your designs. It was particularly interesting to read the descriptions that went with the logos. A great deal of thought was put into the submissions.

Unfortunately we can only have one winner and after much deliberation we chose the one below.

Congratulations and sincere thanks to Richard Gill for a truly stunning design. Your prize of \$100.00 is in the mail. It is...really!

We are now in the process of setting out letter-heads, website banners and all that goes with a change of this nature.



Speaking of changes, our new look website is now up and running and ready for everyone to visit. A snapshot of the site is on the next page.

It has been a huge undertaking and I would like to thank the following people for an outstanding job.

Grant Ettrick and Dave Fregon - if not for their generosity of time and amazing skills we would not have such a magnificent site. Your efforts are truly appreciated.

To Julian and Jamie your contribution has been a great help. While you may think your input has been minimal I can only repeat the adage: *many hands make light work*. Well done and thank you both.

The new site will be interactive, which means once an Atheist Foundation member is registered, articles etc can be submitted. Of course they will need to be approved before being published live.

So come along and join in, it is after all *your* website.

And don't forget to check out the AFA Forum - www.atheistfoundation.org.au/forums

and

Facebook - www.facebook.com/pages/Maitland-Australia/Atheist-Foundation-of-Australia-inc/38706925484

Lee



Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Established
1970

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ATHEISM

is the acceptance that there is no credible scientific or factually reliable evidence for the existence of a god, gods or the supernatural.

Free Associate Membership of the Atheist Foundation of Australia | Ask us a Question, no query is too trivial!

latest news

The Australian Atheist Bus Campaign in Perspective



The growing list of countries running or intending to run Atheist adverts on buses are Britain, France, Spain, Italy, the USA, Canada, and Ireland.

Places most likely to disallow displays of Atheists advertisements on buses are Australia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Africa and other politically/religious dysfunctional regimes.

Repression of Expression



The story in The Guardian (UK) about the London bus slogan campaign gathered widespread attention in Australian media. Also in that report and unfortunately left out by our newspapers is that all metropolitan bus companies have rejected a similar program by Atheists in Australia.

President, David Nicholls said, "Are we so provincial and narrow in outlook that apart from banning such adverts, the local media refuses even to mention it?

Atheists Pursue Redress with Anti-Discrimination Legislation

The *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc* is to complain to the Tasmanian Anti-discrimination Commissioner following the refusal of Metro Tasmania, a State owned bus company, to display its advertisements.

President of the Foundation, David Nicholls said: "Following legal advice we have decided to lodge the complaint. It is unfortunate the AFA has to go down this path to achieve justice. However, there is no grudge involved here, just a simple matter of what is right."

Media Releases

[Victory for Free Speech in Tasmania](#)

Thursday, June 25, 2009

[A Travesty of Democracy](#)

Saturday, May 23, 2009

[Ridding the National Deficit](#)

Saturday, May 2, 2009

[News Flash!! Shock Resignation of AFA President](#)

Wednesday, April 1, 2009

[Preposterous Papal Pronouncements](#)

Monday, March 23, 2009

[Finally, Atheists' Slogans on Buses](#)

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

[Atheists Pursue Second Anti-discrimination Case in Victoria](#)

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

[The Australian Atheist Bus Campaign in Perspective](#)

Saturday, January 17, 2009

[Repression of Expression](#)

Thursday, January 8, 2009

[No One is Immune from the Horrific Lottery of Dying from a Terminal Illness](#)

Monday, December 15, 2008

[more](#)

Latest Submissions

Registry of letters received from members of the public re Religious Education in Schools

Tuesday, December 16, 2008

[Response to the Hon Wayne Swan's Press Release number 36 regarding Australia's future tax system.](#)

Tuesday, June 24, 2008

[Submissions for the Australia 2020 Summit](#)

Saturday, April 19, 2008

[Rights of the Terminally Ill \(Euthanasia Laws Repeal\) Bill 2008](#)

Thursday, March 27, 2008

[Religious Education in South Australian State Schools](#)

Tuesday, August 14, 2007

[Submission to the Consultation Committee for the Proposed Western Australia Human Rights Act](#)

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

[Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools](#)

Tuesday, June 5, 2007

[National Inquiry into Discrimination against People in Same-Sex Relationships](#)

Friday, June 16, 2006

[Government Funded Abortion Counselling](#)

Sunday, June 11, 2006

[Federal Government and Religious Education](#)

Sunday, June 11, 2006

[more](#)

random questions answered

- Don't Atheists have to prove that a god does not exist?
- If you do not believe in "God", then from where does your morality come?
- Do Atheists hate religious people?
- Is Atheism just another religion?
- Do you believe in a supreme being?

[All FAQs](#)



latest from the forum

- world wide telescope
- How Cults Re-wire The Brain
- Just received a 419 scam email .
- Rudd to lobby Pope on Aussie saint
- KRudd, Abbott & Costello, little JohnJohn, Malcolm Cock'n'Bull are all guilty!!

[more](#)

A Day in the Mind of an Atheist

By David Nicholls

In the morning, when consciousness is struggling to begin facing the day, the habit of having a coffee kicks the neurons into gear. The mind stirs and is suddenly alive and aware that it is facing a new adventure. No death in sleep this time. One night though, but then again I wouldn't know, would I?

The sun casts a golden glow in the east. No illusions as to thoughts of supernatural origins begetting this nuclear furnace for the most of history, for me. Pondering how the ancients considered the Earth as the centre of everything, with the Sun revolving around it, has me thanking my lucky stars for the scientific knowledge existent today.

Heading out for my early morning stroll in the chill winter air with a thick fog encompassing all before me, gladdens the feeling that I am entering the realm of nature in the raw. No need to fear mysterious and ghostly creatures suddenly appearing out of the mist or indeed, the 'Devil' arriving to take my 'soul', or any other such nonsensical happening.

The excess moisture dripping from the gum leaves and branches reminds me of the interdependence and interplay of chemicals and structures of them, and how the immensity of time has moulded all things to be as they now are in my presence.

A disappearing rabbit, a kangaroo in the distance, the first call of a raven with the ensuing warble of awakening magpies heralds the new day. Life, as it has been in a multitude of shapes and sizes since time immemorial, prepares to live once again, to feed, to become strong, all for the purpose of eventual reproduction. My mind can hardly appreciate the thousands upon thousands of times the circle of life, for each animal I pass, has taken place.

Reality of the harshness of nature is brought home with a pile of feathers strewn at the base of a wattle. To live, some must die and a mockery of "god is love" passes through my thoughts. How many creatures were torn asunder last night? This is not creative love — this is sadism by an all-powerful monster. I move away from these thoughts before despondency about the foolishness of a god-fearing humanity sets in.

The fog gives way to the rising heat of the sun, and in the distance the mosaic patterns known so well re-establish themselves, with my amazement as new, as though it were the first sighting. How full of wonder it is to be alive.

Breakfast is accompanied by the radio telling of all the new horrors that have taken place locally and internationally. As each item is reported, the count for religious responsibility rises and I marvel why the connection is not mainstream. My heart is saddened for those thus suffering, and in opposition, my joy in having rejected superstition somewhat ameliorates the feelings of guilt that the religious should have but do not.

Today is Sunday, and whilst billions of other people will be mumbling to their god, I will be shopping for food. I contemplate for a moment what I would think, were I a god and what effect a few billion or so whining, whinging and crawling servants would have on me. They do not even know if I really exist, yet, that does not stop them. What a sad and frightened lot is my creation. Too brainwashed to think for themselves. Back to reality land and I am oh so happy that I am not one of them.

The shopping centre is a hive of activity. A collection of humanity busily pushing and rushing and mostly looking unhappy. The cupboard was bare and now the trolley is overfull. I do not thank a god for this harvest but I do consider the effect my living has on the planet. I buy with this in mind, looking for ingredients and packaging that have the least effect on precious earthly resources. It is very noticeable that not many of my fellow purchasers are similarly discerning and I ponder if the "god will provide" philosophy is at fault. To some extent, this would have to be correct.

(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)

The car takes me away from the crowded shops. The millions-of-years-aged petrol pollutes the atmosphere as I go, leaving me reinstating promises of being as thrifty as possible with its use. There is some consolation, in that of the religious people I know, most are more concerned with the actual monetary cost of fuel and it is reinforced with me that such a philosophy is flawed at the basic level.

Passing the ample supply of churches, I notice that some are full and some are not. A profound happiness enters my consciousness at having escaped the cultural absurdities of worshipping a pretend god. My luck in this can only be described as beyond belief. To be born is winning the lottery, to live for an average span is another, but to be able to think any thought without guilt or compromise, is the lottery of all lotteries.

The rest of the day is occupied with natural process, and away from the ever-present reminders of godly things, such thoughts are not even entertained. The pleasure of a quiet dinner with a couple of wines, of writing to a few friends via e-mail, of another attempt at fixing a broken gate, of phoning a family member and just contemplating the joy of living, leaves the mind in a state of comfort and serenity.

The night has arrived, it is a few hours old, and the rain is softly pelting on the western windows. The television has transformed from the entertaining to the banal and it is time to retire for this day.

As I lie in bed before sleep envelopes my universe, I contemplate today's events. My very last thoughts, before I am unconscious once again, revolve around my incredible luck of arriving at a position of actually seeing life as life really is. The induced phantoms of a ubiquitously taught unreality lay slain, and exist no more.

I drift off into the land of Nod, and I am complete. Goodnight.

“The Closed Door”

By Rod Bower

I recently received a brochure, *The Closed Door*. It says if I don't accept the Christian gospel fast I'll spend forever in hell missing all my loved ones!

That same message started me questioning my faith thirty years ago. Both a kind God and a “hell and damnation” God were supported by the Bible. Eventually I resolved the contradiction logically — by deciding there was no God at all! There are just people making up stories to manipulate others, or believing what's been drilled into them since they were babies. So now I am a happy atheist.

My “loss of faith” was painful back then, but was also the most empowering thing I've done. And contrary to what some would expect I remain the same caring, responsible person I always was.

I write so that anyone upset by that nasty little brochure might consider the possibility that any “gods” simply don't exist. Instead of looking for “God's will”, just think before you act, be the best person you can, and enjoy this life while you are able. There is nothing after death except the same painless non-existence that was there before you were born.

From *The Age* 11 July 09

Kevin Rudd would be less of an embarrassment if he took the issue of justice for Australian victims of sexual abuse by the Roman Catholic Church to the Pope instead of an anti-science belief in miracles.

Andrew Rawlings

IN THE NEWS

Anger over ‘ignorant’ sign

The Advertiser 6 July 09

Lauren Zwaansa

A sign outside a Seacliff Baptist Church describing human life as an “undeserving gift from God” has been described as “incredibly ignorant”.

The messages, visible outside South West Baptist Church on Brighton Rd last month, caused resident Brett Whittaker* to lodge a complaint with the church and Holdfast Bay Council.

“The south-facing sign read ‘your next breath and your next heartbeat: an undeserving gift from God’,” Mr Whittaker said.

“The north-facing sign said ‘Evolution: Man’s way of avoiding responsibility’. These signs...devalue human life and promote an incredibly ignorant position with regard to science,” he said.

Holdfast Bay councillor Tim Looker supported that position.

“Brett’s letter came through and I followed up with him saying I found those messages a bit alarmist and ignorant,” he said.

“While I recognise free speech, I am concerned about fundamentalist views based in ignorance, as that’s been the base of world terror. I think our fundamentalists are just as dangerous as other fundamentalists.”

Mr Looker said while the church was not breaking any law, it was “promoting ignorance”.

South West Baptist Church Pastor Brenton Honeychurch said the signs, which were changed at least fortnightly, were to “provoke thinking”. “They are there to enable people to understand that life is from God and that life has come from creation,” he said.

Mr Honeychurch said because the signs were of a religious nature some people would always react.

“We like people to be provoked to think but we’re not out to offend anyone,” he said. “We’re undeserving in the sense we’ve fallen short of God’s glory but man has a high value before God. I would never say that people are undeserving of life, it’s open to interpretation.”

*Brett is a member of the AFA.

No kisses please - we’re Christians

The Advertiser 7 July 09

Tory Shepherd

A radical U.S. preacher, who is set to visit Adelaide, says young Christians should not kiss or cuddle before marriage because they will get carried away and end up having sex.

Evangelist Sy Rogers, who says he is a former prostitute, transsexual and gay man, says “kisses and cuddles” and the “good old pash” are foreplay that people should not engage in before marriage.

Rogers, who says homosexuality can be “cured” with prayer, will speak at a conference at Enfield Baptist Church next month.

In a preview released yesterday, he promoted an extreme form of chastity.

“So when is it time to stir up sexual desire?” he asked. “When you can afford to: in marriage. ‘Control sexual desire; don’t let it control you.’”

While many churches, including the Catholics, the Anglicans and the Lutherans, promote chastity before marriage, it is unusual to suggest young people should have no contact at all.

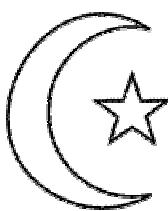
Sexual health experts say the abstinence message is a dangerous one, because it leaves young people without the education and confidence to deal with sexual issues.

SHine SA teacher education co-ordinator Jane Flentje said such extreme measures could lead to shame and guilt, and even increase the chances of sexual exploitation.

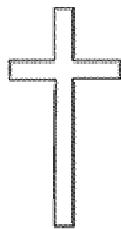
“(Abstinence) may mean kids delay having sex a bit longer, but on the whole they don’t wait until they’re married,” she said. “When they do start having sex they’re not using contraceptives and condoms as often, and they’re not as comfortable talking to people about it.”

“If kids don’t get any opportunity to learn about this stuff and explore relationships, they’re much more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.”

Turkish TV show - Convert an Atheist



The show, called "Tovbekarlar Yarisiyor," or "Penitents Compete," features a Muslim imam, a Catholic priest, a Jewish rabbi and a Buddhist monk attempting to persuade 10 atheists of the merits of their religion.

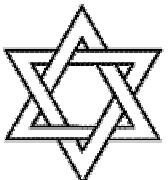


According to the show's slogans, contestants will also win "serenity" and "the biggest prize ever... the belief in God".

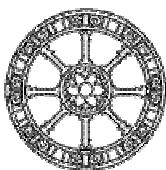
The competition is strictly limited to non-believers and contestants will be vetted by an eight-strong commission of theologians before they are allowed to take part.

If they succeed, the contestants are rewarded with a pilgrimage to one of their chosen faith's most sacred sites — Mecca for Muslims, Jerusalem for converts to Judaism, a trip to Tibet for Buddhists and the chance to visit Ephesus and the Vatican for Christians.

Ahmet Ozdemir, deputy director of Turkish channel Kanal T, which will air the show from September, said the program aimed to "turn disbelievers on to God."



Converts will then be monitored to ensure their religious transformation is genuine and not simply contrived to gain a free holiday. "They can't see this trip as a getaway, but as a religious experience," Mr Ozdemir said.



But the show has been condemned by Turkish religious leaders including the head of the country's supreme council of religious affairs, Hamza Aktan.

"To do such a thing for the sake of ratings, not only with Islam but with all religions is disrespectful. Religion should not be the subject of this type of program," said Aktan.

Abba star backs atheist bus adverts

An atheist campaign employing adverts on the sides of buses has angered Muslims and Christians in Sweden, where the adverts have appeared. The atheist campaign received a boost when the Abba composer Bjorn Ulvaeus signalled his support. The wording was changed in two towns because the bus companies did not want to cause offence.



The wording *There's probably not a God. Stop worrying and enjoy life*, was altered to *Enjoy life as if it was the only one. For it is*.

The protest started with Muslim bus drivers and soon spread to Christian groups. But the Abba star welcomed the campaign, saying that it 'could hardly be more timely.'

He also launched an attack on faith schools.

"Unfortunately the European Convention on Human Rights doesn't permit the banning of independent religious schools. Under current Swedish law,

independent schools may adopt a 'confessional direction's long as they stick to the official national curriculum and adhere to the education systems 'general goals and values'.

"A lot of independently managed schools (friskolor) negotiate this balancing act well, but there are also a lot of schools that don't.

"If it wished, Sweden could choose to refrain from using tax money to fund these independent schools. There is nothing in the European Convention on Human Rights that prevents such a course of action. But Sweden has chosen to go the other way.

"So do the legal guidelines outlined above ensure that pupils at religious schools are educated in an environment that does not favour any one ideology or religion above all others? No, of course they don't," he said.

"It is important to guarantee people the right to believe whatever they wish. But people should be free to choose their own ideology or belief system when they have become old enough to think for themselves," he said.

He added that a religious education makes it more difficult for children to form their own views on the world. "It puts obstacles in their way that not all are capable of overcoming."

HUMOUR

An atheist buys an ancient lamp at an auction, takes it home, and begins to polish it. Suddenly, a genie appears, and says, "I'll grant you three wishes, Master." The atheist says, "I wish I could believe in you." The genie snaps his fingers, and suddenly the atheist believes in him. The atheist says, "Wow. I wish all atheists would believe this." The genie snaps his fingers again, and suddenly atheists all over the world begin to believe in genies. "What about your third wish?" asks the genie. "Well," says the atheist, "I wish for a billion dollars." The genie snaps his fingers for a third time, but nothing happens. "What's wrong?" asks the atheist. The genie shrugs and says, "Just because you believe in me, doesn't necessarily mean that I really exist."



During the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, one morning's executions began with three men: a rabbi, a Catholic priest, and a rationalist skeptic. The rabbi was marched up onto the platform first. There, facing the guillotine, he was asked if he had any last words. And the rabbi cried out, "I believe in the one and only true God, and He shall save me." The executioner then positioned the rabbi below the blade, set the block above his neck, and pulled the cord to set the terrible instrument in motion. The heavy cleaver plunged downward, searing the air. But then, abruptly, it stopped with a crack just a few inches above the would-be victim's neck. To which the rabbi said, "I told you so."

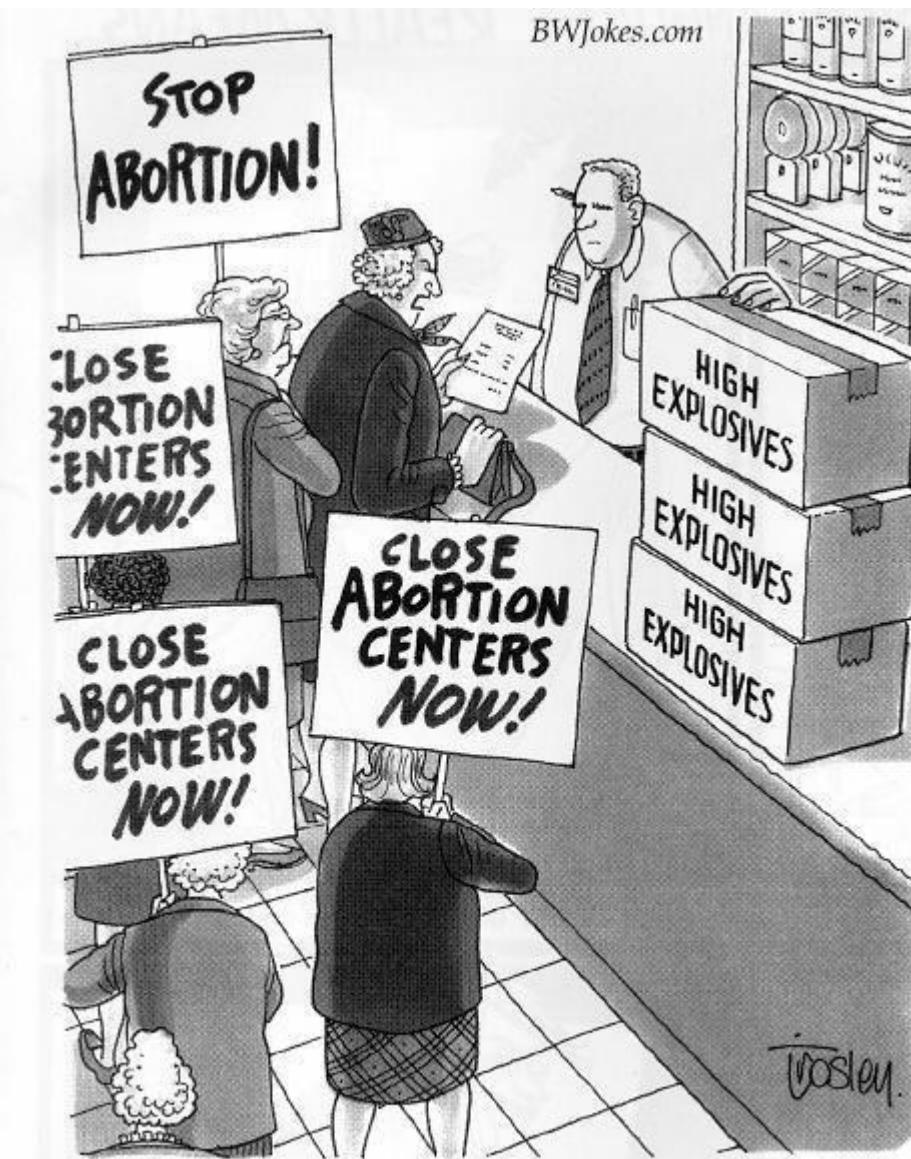
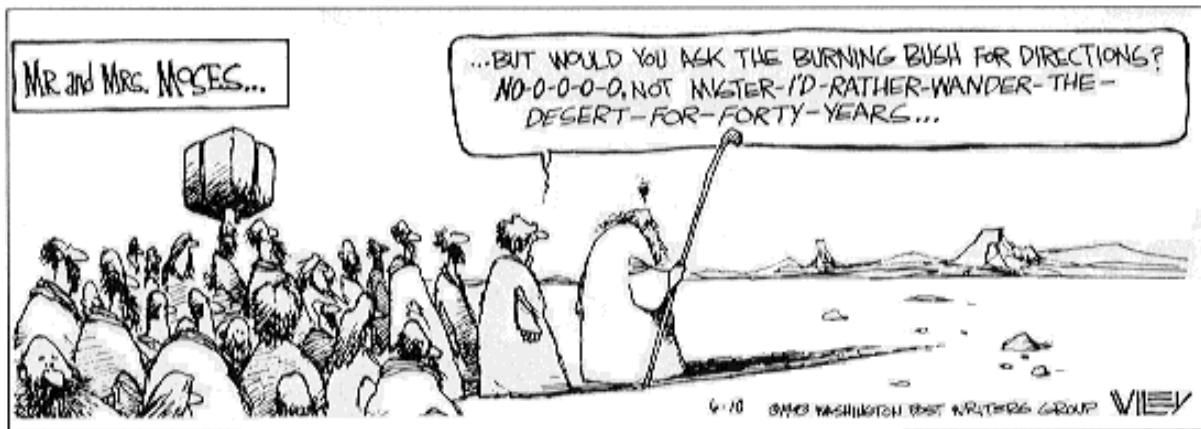
"It's a miracle!" gasped the crowd. And the executioner had to agree, letting the rabbi go.

Next in line was the priest. Asked for his final words, he declared, "I believe in Jesus Christ the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost who will rescue me in my hour of need." The executioner then positioned this man beneath the blade. And he pulled the cord. Again the blade flew downward thump! creak!...stopping just short of its mark once more. "Another miracle!" sighed the disappointed crowd. And the executioner for the second time had no choice but to let the condemned go free.

Now it was the skeptic's turn. "What final words have you to say?" he was asked. But the skeptic didn't hear. Staring intently at the ominous engine of death, he seemed lost. Not until the executioner poked him in the ribs and the question was asked again did he reply.

"Oh, I see your problem," the skeptic said pointing. "You've got a blockage in the gear assembly, right there!"

HUMOUR



VIEW FROM AMERICA

You have to hand it to the religionists here in the United States: they're always coming up with new and creative ways to push their message in the face of anyone who will listen, or is forced to listen. In June, a US Appeals Court ruled that Donna Kay Busch could not read Biblical passages to students at a suburban Philadelphia elementary school. Normally, there would be no question about anyone being allowed to do this, but Mrs Busch attempted it during her son's *All About Me* program. As it turns out, the boy's REAL favourite book was *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* as testified to by his baby sitter! I wonder if this book is also fiction. I'd be willing to bet that no one gets killed, boiled and eaten, or attacked by swarms of locusts.

Speaking of books, a new one by Charles P. Pierce is just hitting the bookshelves here. It's called *Idiot America*, and I just started reading it a few days ago. The introduction tells us of Mr. Pierce's trip to the creationist museum that opened in the state of Kentucky a few years ago. These short lines from the intro are a good indication of where this book is going:

Dinosaurs with saddles?
Dinosaurs on Noah's Ark?
Welcome to your new Eden.

Welcome to Idiot America.

Come to think of it; I've been telling you, my good Aussie readers, about "Idiot America" for several years now. Pierce just thought of that great title first! I wonder how long it will take him to publish Idiot America Books 2 to 20? He'll never run out of material in this country.

How many of you happened to hear President Obama's D-Day speech in France? Once again, as he did back in January at his Inauguration, he included those of us with "no faith". If you missed it on 6 June here's the paragraph:

"The nations and leaders that joined together to defeat Hitler's Reich were not perfect. We had made our share of mistakes, and had not always agreed with one another on every issue. But whatever God we prayed to, whatever our differences, we knew that the evil we faced had to be stopped. Citizens of all faiths and no faith came to believe that we could not remain as bystanders to the savage perpetration of death and destruction. And so we joined and sent our sons to fight and often die so that men and women they never met might know what it is to be free."



I can't say for sure if these are all Obama's words, or, as in many cases, the combined efforts of a number of speech writers and Obama himself. It does make you wonder what's under that Christian exterior that he *must* have in order to be elected to high office in this country.

With our later deadline this month, I have time to touch on another story of hypocrisy involving two more members of the "Family Values" Republican Party. Governor Mark Sanford of South Carolina and US Senator John Ensign of Nevada recently admitted to having extra-marital affairs. Yawn! — so what's new you ask? It turns out that both of them are associated with a small, underground religious group in Washington DC which is called the Foundation, or sometimes Fellowship or Family. Their building is an apartment house that calls itself a church so they can get away without paying taxes. Of course, the Congressmen that rent the apartments get a sweetheart deal!

Who provides the religious indoctrination to these lawmakers? His name is Douglas Coe who appears to be rather elusive. NBC News was able to get an interview from him in 1989 and here's a couple of excerpts: In one videotaped sermon from 1989, Coe provides this account of the atrocities committed under Chairman Mao in Communist China: "I've seen pictures of the young men in the Red Guard...they would bring in this young man's mother...he would take an axe and cut her head off. They have to put the purposes of the Red Guard ahead of father, mother, brother sister and their own life. That was a covenant, a pledge. That's what Jesus said."

Later in the sermon, Coe said: "Jesus said, 'You have to put me before other people. And you have to put me before yourself.' Hitler, that was the demand to be in the Nazi party. You have to put the Nazi party and its objectives ahead of your own life and ahead of other people."

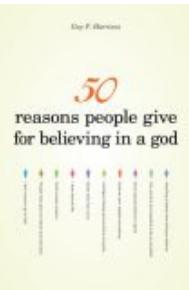
Of course, there's more on line if you care to read more about this influential, behind-the-scenes preacher.

I'll end on this note with the *good* news: There are over 15,000 kilometres between Coe and Australia!

BOOK REVIEWS

50 Reasons People Give for Believing in a God

by Guy P. Harrison Reviewed by Charles Cornwall



(354 pages with bibliography and recommended reading at conclusion of each chapter). Prometheus Books, 2008.

Over the past decade or so I have read the works of a number of eminent scholars who use evidence-based facts and logic to debunk belief in God, gods or the supernatural, authors like Russell, Sagan, Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens and I am now in the happy position to add another name to the list – Guy P. Harrison.

I have just finished reading Harrison’s *50 Reasons People Give for Believing in a God*. (Note the indefinite article. The “target” is not Christianity in particular, or even the major religions of the present time, but religious belief in general.) In this book Harrison, a graduate of the University of South Florida with degrees in history and anthropology and currently a columnist and travel writer for a national newspaper, presents many of the arguments to be found in the books of Dawkins and others. He does so, however, in a way that is less likely to be counter-productive by raising the ire of the believer. His non-combative style does not diminish the strength of his arguments but makes it less likely to alienate believers.

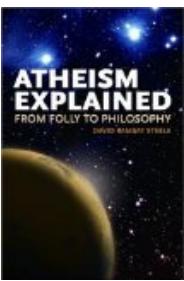
Harrison’s book has 50 chapters, each one beginning with one of the many reasons given for believing in god(s). Here is a sample list: *My god answers prayers; Without my god we would have no sense of right and wrong; Intelligent design proves my god is real; Science can’t explain everything; No one has ever disproved the existence of my god*. Harrison explains the believer’s rationale for each of the 50 given reasons and then, without demeaning the believer, proceeds to demonstrate their deficiencies. In doing it this way his rebuttal is in no way weakened but it does lessen the chance of the believer digging in his or her heels. Harrison never infers that the believer is of inferior intelligence and never resorts to personal insults.

Harrison has travelled widely, though not in “those fancy bus tours with cheerful guides” (to use his own words), but as a “sole traveller”. This has enabled him to experience life in the raw in many diverse countries. In the process he has talked to many people of widely differing cultures and religious beliefs. He has also witnessed the rituals and acts of corporate worship of many of these religions. This has given him an understanding of how people – intelligent people – believe as they do, even though their beliefs make contradictory claims and lack supporting evidence.

Harrison’s travel experiences and contacts with people of many faiths have not only influenced his understanding of why people believe as they do but also contributed to his non-combative approach. This sets his book apart from some others of this genre and, in my opinion, for the better. To say his style is non-combative is not to imply that he does not confront the issues head on. He does, and with very effective and persuasive logic. As a bonus, he tells the stories of some of his travel experiences, thereby enhancing the wonderful readability of his book. I unhesitatingly recommend Guy Harrison’s *50 Reasons People Give for Believing in a God*.

Atheism Explained: From folly to philosophy.

by David Ramsay Steele (ISBN-13: 978-0-81226-9637-0) Reviewed by Terry Fowler



In my opinion *Atheism Explained* gives a well-rounded overview by way of asking and answering questions from the ‘faithful’ and the ‘atheists’. One quote from the book: “If the God hypothesis is a promising one, then we don’t need to appeal to faith. If the God hypothesis doesn’t sit well with the evidence we have, then we should reject it and it would be wrong to seek to cling to it by giving it some privileged exemption from criticism. Faith is always at war with truth, because if we try to make

(Continued on page 25)

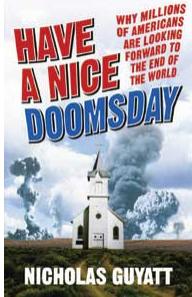
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ourselves arrive at a predetermined conclusion, we run the risk of not dealing honestly with the evidence."

As the cover notes "A clear, concise, complete, and convincing presentation of the case for atheism" — Victor J. Stenger.

Have A Nice Doomsday: Why millions of Americans are looking forward to the end of the world'.

by UK author Nicholas Guyatt (ISBN 9780091910877) Reviewed by Terry Fowler



As the back cover says: "Strange, funny and unsettling in equal measure, *Have a Nice Doomsday* uncovers the apocalyptic obsession that lies at the heart of the world's only-superpower." One interesting point raised is the appearance of a video game *Eternal Forces* which finds the player in the middle of New York at the start of the Tribulation with a courier bag and the ability to convert passers-by! As Guyatt points out "Rather implausibly, the pedestrians don't run away from you when they see you coming at them with your Bible. When you've converted a character, they shimmer for a few seconds as if they've been through the transporter in Star Trek, then you get to control them as well. Helpfully, they let you know who's in charge when you click on them: I'm ready for your direction!" Helpfully, they shout. Enlighten me!"

Perhaps some enterprising games company could come up with the atheists' version?

ATHEISTS RIOTED IN THE
STREETS WORLDWIDE TODAY
REACTION TO A DANISH
CARTOON DEPICTING NOBODY
WITH A BOMB ON
TOP OF HIS
HEAD.



The Atheist's Prayer

Our brains, which art in our heads,
treasured be thy name.
Thy reasoning come.
Thy best you can do be done on earth as it is.
Give us this day new insight
to help us resolve conflicts and ease pain.
And lead us not into supernatural explanations;
deliver us from denial of logic.
For thine is the kingdom of reason,
and even though thy powers are limited,
and you're not always glorious,
you are the best evolutionary adaptation
we have for helping this earth
now and forever
and ever.
So be it.

MEDIA RELEASE

A Travesty of Democracy

Father Frank Brennan, a leading public relations figure for one of the wealthiest corporations in Australia, the Roman Catholic Church, an organisation infamous for, amongst other things, sexual, mental and physical abuse of children, refusal to grant equality to women, and ongoing vilification of same-sex-oriented people is heading a Federal Government consultation on Human Rights in Australia.

Twenty to fifty percent of the population have no or minimal beliefs in the supernatural but there is only small reference to the rights of those with no religion.

With no intention of demeaning the immense value brought to wider human rights issues by Frank Brennan the task before the committee on Human Rights in Australia is about equality under established law. Father Brennan cannot adjudicate with an impartial mind on matters conflicting with his faith.

The Atheist Foundation of Australia is appalled at the government decision to have such a biased and inflexible ideologically driven person on a committee making decisions for every Australian. This does not bode well for an outcome promising equality of human rights for all citizens.

The AFA calls for the immediate resignation of Father Frank Brennan, replaced by an impartial representative of the community not influenced by personal religious beliefs.

Victory for free speech in Tasmania Atheist bus-advert rejection to be conciliated

The Office of the Anti-discrimination Commissioner has determined that Metro Tasmania Pty Ltd has a case to answer. A compulsory conciliation conference between the *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc* and *Metro Tasmania Pty Ltd* will take place on 4 August 09.

The initial excuse given by Metro Tasmania was they had changed their policy. Metro Tasmania has now amended that excuse.

Without the insistence of the *Atheist Foundation of Australia* in sighting the alleged changes to policy, the false Metro assertion that the policy had changed may have gone unnoticed.

President of the *Atheist Foundation of Australia*, David Nicholls said; "This disclosure came as quite a surprise as we were more interested in the fact that Metro Tasmania bus advertising space had previously contained religious oriented signs on a number of occasions. Even on this, Metro Tasmania has not made any admissions. I am very disappointed with their attitude. Getting to the truth has been akin to pulling teeth."

"I would ask anyone who has knowledge of faith based posters on Metro Tasmania buses in the past to contact our lawyer, James Crotty."

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In June 2009 millions of people came out on to the streets of Iran for freedom and an end to the Islamic regime. Whilst the June 12 election was a pretext for the protests - elections have never been free or fair in Iran — it has opened the space for people to come to the fore with their own slogans.

The world has been encouraged by the protestors' bravery and humane demands and horrified by the all-out repression they have faced. It has seen a different image of Iran - one of a population that refuses to kneel even after 30 years of living under Islamic rule.

The dawn that this movement heralds for us across the world is a promising one - one that aims to bring Iran into the 21st century and break the back of the political Islamic movement internationally.

This is a movement that must be supported.

Declaration

We, the undersigned, join Iran Solidarity to declare our unequivocal solidarity with the people of Iran. We hear their call for freedom and stand with them in opposition to the Islamic regime of Iran.

We demand:

1. The immediate release of all those imprisoned during the recent protests and all political prisoners
2. The arrest and public prosecution of those responsible for the current killings and atrocities and for those committed during the last 30 years.
3. Proper medical attention to those wounded during the protests and ill-treated and tortured in prison. Information on the status of the dead, wounded and arrested to their families. The wounded and arrested must have access to their family members. Family members must be allowed to bury their loved ones where they choose.
4. A ban on torture.
5. The abolition of the death penalty and stoning.
6. Unconditional freedom of expression, thought, organisation, demonstration, and strike.
7. Unconditional freedom of the press and media and an end to restrictions on communications, including the internet, telephone, mobiles and satellite television programmes.
8. An end to compulsory veiling and gender apartheid.
9. The abolition of discriminatory laws against women and the establishment of complete equality between men and women.
10. The complete separation of religion from the state, judiciary, education and religious freedom and atheism as a private matter.

Moreover, we call on all governments and international institutions to isolate the Islamic Republic of Iran and break all diplomatic ties with it. We are opposed to military intervention and economic sanctions because of their adverse affects on people's lives.

The people of Iran have spoken; we stand with them.

The *Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc* is a signatory to the above Declaration.

If you would like to add your signature visit <http://www.iransolidarity.org.uk>

ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

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I/We agree with the Aims and Philosophy of the
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc and hereby apply for Membership,

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**It would be appreciated if members and friends made provision in their Wills
for the ongoing objectives of the Foundation.**

Please photocopy this application form if you would rather not remove this page.